

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-13 ISO-00 PM-04 NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15

CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 PA-01 PRS-01 ACDA-07

EAE-00 /077 W

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P R 261001Z AUG 76

FM AMEMBASSY SEOUL

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9087

INFO AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY TAIPEI

AMEMBASSY TOKYO

USLO PEKING

USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

USIA WASHDC

CINCPAC

CINCUNC SEOUL

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CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: SOPN, MOPS, KS, KN, US

SUBJECT: ROK REACTIONS TO PANMUNJOM DEVELOPMENTS

REF: (A) STATE 206131 (DTG 190517Z AUG 76), (B) SEOUL 6667
(DTG 251049Z AUG 76)

BEGIN SUMMARY: ON AUGUST 26, KOREAN PAPERS GAVE HEAVY COVERAGE TO MAC MEETING AND STATEMENTS MADE IN WASHINGTON AUG. 25, BUT MADE LITTLE COMMENT. COMMENTARY EMPHASIZED NEED FOR CAUTION ABOUT NORTH'S SUGGESTIONS, RATHER THAN DISSATISFACTION WITH U.S. RESPONSE. END SUMMARY.

1. ON AUGUST 26, KOREAN NEWSPAPERS GAVE FRONT-PAGE TREATMENT TO MAC MEETING AT PANMUNJOM ON AUGUST 25, BUT HAVE MOSTLY MOVED
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ON TO OTHER TOPICS. MORNING CHOSON ILBO AND HANGUK ILBO BOTH

GAVE MAJOR COVERAGE TO UNC CHIEF DELATATE FRUDDEN'S CONTINUED DEMAND FOR PUNISHMENT OF THOSE RESPONSIBLE FOR INCIDENT AND NORTH CHIEF DELEGATE HAN CHU-GYONG'S REPLY. ACCOUNTS STRESSED LATTER'S STATEMENT THAT INCIDENT WAS "REGRETTABLE," HIS FAILURE TO ADDRESS ISSUES OF PUNISHMENT AND GUARANTEES, AND HIS PROPOSAL TO "DIVIDE THE JSA." PAPERS NOTE THAT FRUDDEN PROMISED TO GOVE HAN'S SUGGESTION CAREFUL STUDY. HANGUK ILBO ALSO RAN ARTICLE BY KIM TAE-UNG, ITS WASHINGTON CORRESPONDENT, NOTING STATEMENTS MADE BY DEPT. SPOKESMAN FUNSETH ALONG SAME LINES. FUNSETH IS QUOTED THAT INCIDENT IS NOT CLOSED YET AND THAT NEXT STEP WILL BE TO STUDY AND DISCUSS NORTH'S PROPOSAL AND CONVEY RESPONSE.

2. NEITHER OF MORNING PAPERS CARRIED EDITORIAL COMMENT ON DMZ INCIDENT.

3. ENGLISH-LANGUAGE KOREA TIMES AND KOREA HERALD GIVE SIMILAR FRONT-PAGE COVERAGE TO MAC MEETING. GOVERNMENT RUN KOREA HERALD ADDED INSIDE FEATURE ARTICLES TELLING OF SEPARATE INTERVIEWS WITH UNNAMED NORTH KOREAN EXPERTS AND PROFESSOR CHOI KYONG-NAK OF THE NATIONAL DEFENSE COLLEGE. BOTH THESE ARTICLES MENTION THAT, IN COURSE OF DEALING WITH INCIDENT, ROK AND US HAVE "DEMONSTRATED REINFORCED COOPERATION" AND BOTH COUNTRIES HAVE RECOGNIZED AGAIN "THE IMPORTANCE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ROLE OF THE AMERICAN TROOPS IN KOREA."

4. COVERAGE AND THEMES IN AFTERNOON PAPERS SIMILAR, WITH ALL PAPERS PLAYING UP THE MAC MEETING, MOST GIVING IT HEADLINE COVERAGE. IN AN UNUSUAL STEP, PAPERS GAVE SUMMARY OF STATEMENTS OF BOTH SIDES. PAPERS NOTED LACK OF USUAL NK TERMINOLOGY ABUSIVE OF U.S. ON AUGUST 26, U.S. DEFENSE DEPARTMENT ANNOUNCED DETAILS OF TREE-CUTTING OPERATION OF AUGUST 21, AND ALL AFTERNOON PAPERS CARRIED FRONT-PAGE PHOTOGRAPHS OF THAT OPERATION. IT WAS NOTED THAT 64 ROK SOLDIERS AND 46 AMERICANS TOOK PART.

5. PAPERS REPORTED THAT, ON AUGUST 25, DRP AND YU-JONG-HOI LEADERS HAD BEEN BRIEFED AT DRP HEADQUARTERS BY FONMIN PAK TONG-JIN AND DEFENSE MINISTER SO CHONG-CHOL ON PANMUNJOM INCIDENT AND COUNTERMEASURES. BOTH MINISTERS NOTED THAT ROKG AND USG HAVE COOPERATED CLOSELY AT ALL STAGES, BOTH DIPLOMATICALLY AND MILITARILY.

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6. PAPERS TODAY ALSO REPORTED THAT A SOURCE IN THE ROK FONOFF SAID THAT NORTH KOREA (NK) SHOULD FIRST RESPOND TO UNC DEMAND FOR PUNISHMENT AND GUARANTEE OF SECURITY OF UN FORCES PERSONNEL, ADDING THAT NK'S PROPOSAL TO DIVIDE THE JSA IN TWO MAY JUST BE AN ATTEMPT TO DELAY OR AVOID ANSWERING THE UNC DEMAND.

7. THERE WAS LITTLE COMMENTARY ON DEVELOPMENTS IN AFTERMATH

OF DMZ INCIDENT. GOVT SEOUL SHIN-MUN HAD OPWY EDITORIAL ON SUBJECT. OTHER PAPERS, NOTABLY CHUNG-ANG ILBO AND TONGA ILBO, CARRIED ONLY SUMMARIES OF EDITORIALS IN JAPANESE NEWSPAPERS. BOTH QUOTED SANKEI'S ANALYSIS THAT NK SUGGESTION TO DIVIDE JSA IN TWO IS ATTEMPT TO RENDER ARMISTICE AGREEMENT A DEAD LETTER AND FIRST STAGE OF A MANEUVER TO CONCLUDE A PEACE TREATY WITH US. TONGA ALSO QUOTED ASAHI TO EFFECT THAT, WHETHER OR NOT KIM IL-SONG HAD ORDERED INCIDENT, FACT THAT IT PLAINLY DID NOT GO AS PLANNED MEANT A MISCALCULATION HAD BEEN MADE. KIM WILL LONG BITTERLY REMEMBER MESSAGE OF "REGRET" HE SENT TO US SIDE.

8. AN INSIDE PAGE FEATURE ARTICLE IN TONGA QUOTED "MILITARY ANALYSTS" AS NOTING THAT NK, FOR FIRST TIME, HAD SHOWN POSITIVE RESPONSE TO SUGGESTION FROM UNC SIDE. WHETHER THIS WAS BECAUSE OF THE US SHOW OF FORCE, OR FOR THEIR OWN REASONS, IS NOT CLEAR. ALSO, FACT THAT NK GUARDS STOOD IDLY BY WHILE UN TROOPS CUT TREE REPRESENTS ADMISSION BY KIM IL-SONG THAT AX MURDERS WERE A MISTAKE AND A SUBMISSION TO SIGNS OF STRONG RETALIATION BY USG. EXPRESSION OF "REGRET" ON PART OF KIM, A DICTATOR WHO HAD NEVER ADMITTED A MISTAKE, IS AN EXTRAORDINARY RETREAT ON HIS PART.

9. ONLY EDITORIAL ON INCIDENT WAS RUN BY GOVERNMENT SEOUL SHIN-MUN. EDITORIAL SAYS, "WE BELIEVE THAT A SECOND STRONG MEASURE IS NEEDED," AND REQUESTS AGAIN THAT ROK AND US GOVERNMENTS PURSUE CLOSER COOPERATION AND CONTINUED STRENGTHENING OF PRESENT POSTURE OF ALERTNESS AND RETALIATION. EDITORIAL CONCLUDED NK PROPOSAL MUST BE FLATLY REJECTED: "ONLY THEIR UNCONDITIONAL SUBMISSION TO OUR DEMANDS WILL SOLVE THE PROBLEM." SNEIDER

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PRESS COMMENTS, DMZ, BORDER INCIDENTS, PUBLIC ATTITUDES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 26 AUG 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: ShawDG
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976SEOUL06700
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760325-1263
From: SEOUL
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760816/aaaaanrf.tel
Line Count: 144
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 76 STATE 206131, 76 SEOUL 6667
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: ShawDG
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 03 MAR 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <03 MAR 2004 by morefirh>; APPROVED <07 SEP 2004 by ShawDG>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: ROK REACTIONS TO PANMUNJOM DEVELOPMENTS
TAGS: SOPN, MOPS, KS, KN, US
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006